

## PREPARING PROJECT PROPOSALS

*This document addresses most, but not all issues that a Project Sponsor must understand and have prepared for when applying for Federal Transportation Enhancement funds*

### 1. DEVELOP CONCEPT

**Define Project Eligibility** – The project must fit in one of the 12 Enhancement activities and must have a relationship to surface transportation. In addition, projects should meet eligibility principles as outlined by the intent of the funding. See Guiding Principles and Questions for TE projects at [www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/principles\\_pt1.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/principles_pt1.htm) for more information and questions to ask.

**Define Project Purpose** – The project must be accessible to the general public or be targeted to a broad segment of the population, and should indicate sustainability or long-term worth.

**Youth Service Corps** – Federal guidance encourages the use of qualified youth conservation or service corps to perform appropriate transportation enhancement activities. See [www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/gmemo\\_youth.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/gmemo_youth.htm) for more information on definitions and guidance.

**Seek out “lessons learned” information** – Visit other similarly funded projects. Talk with personnel to determine what worked and what did not work. Check the TE Clearinghouse website at [www.enhancements.org/projectlist.asp](http://www.enhancements.org/projectlist.asp) to search for projects funded in North Carolina.

### 2. SOLICIT SUPPORT

**Public involvement** – The Enhancement Program supports the principal that public involvement should be an integral part of the project development process.

**Local project support** – Projects must have a local government agency that will act as the Sponsor. The Sponsor will sign a legal agreement with NCDOT to implement the project according to applicable state and federal regulations, provide fiduciary oversight, and assume maintenance. The Sponsor must also provide twenty percent (20%) of project costs as a cash match.

#### **Guiding Questions:**

- What is the support from the local community for this project?
- Has the Sponsor developed the project proposal as a result of an inclusive public involvement process?
- Is the Sponsor committed to long-term maintenance requirements?

#### **Notes:**

- Projects should have local support and be developed as a result of a meaningful public involvement process.

### 3. DEVELOP A PLAN OF ACTION

**Regional Planning Organization** – Work with your local planning agency (Rural Planning Organization or Metropolitan Planning Organization) to ensure the project is integrated into the regional planning process. Go to [www.ncdot.org/financial/fiscal/Enhancement](http://www.ncdot.org/financial/fiscal/Enhancement) and click on Contact Info for your local planning organization.

**Implementation Plan** – Sponsors should develop a timeline of activities as to what must occur and when to successfully execute the project if awarded. The Sponsor should understand how program requirements, such as meeting federal design standards, environmental documentation, right-of-way certification, and advertising and awarding a construction contract pursuant to federal regulations, would affect project schedules and completion dates. A three-year window from **project award** to completion is recommended for most projects.

**Guiding Questions:**

- Will this project affect or be affected by any other proposed or planned Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) projects in the area?
- Does the proposed schedule for planning and construction allow sufficient time for necessary activities? i.e. property (right of way) acquisition; review and approval of plans by appropriate agencies; other scheduled/proposed work.

**Notes:**

- Other TIP projects have the potential to delay Enhancement projects; most common are planned road widening or maintenance where a sidewalk or landscaping project is proposed.
- Federal Rulemaking (effective March 1, 2006) requires documentation of delays and adequate justification of and explanation for delays in order to keep projects active. Projects that FHWA considers inactive may have their funding withdrawn.

#### 4. ASSESS PROPOSED LOCATION

**Right-of-way** – Property for the project must be in public ownership or be accessible by the public (fee simple, permanent easement, lease) using Federal guidelines and requirements. See [www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/gmemo\\_uniformact.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/gmemo_uniformact.htm) for a brief overview of the Uniform Act and Transportation Enhancements.

**Guiding Questions:**

- Does Sponsor own or control all the right of way/property needed for project? If not, is there a plan to obtain ownership or access to right of way/property within one year?
- Has Sponsor factored in the cost of right of way acquisition into their budget?

**Notes:**

- Sponsors who can show that they have all ROW/property necessary for the project may be considered more favorably than those projects that still need to acquire ROW.
- Right of way/acquisition costs are **not** reimbursable by Enhancement funds, except for two categories:
  - 1) Acquisition of scenic easements, scenic or historic sites; and
  - 2) Preservation of abandoned railroad corridors
- All acquisition of property (reimbursable or not) must be in accordance with Federal guidelines under the Uniform Act (see above website).
- The TE Unit does not encourage the use of eminent domain to acquire property. A Sponsor may use simplified acquisition procedures, as long as they inform an owner that the acquiring entity is unable or unwilling to use eminent domain. See [www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/gmemo\\_uniformact.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/gmemo_uniformact.htm)
- Obtaining permission from a railroad to encroach or otherwise be in their right of way can be a time-consuming process. Many projects have failed due to unsuccessful negotiations with railroads.

**Environmental Document** – All Enhancement projects must be in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). See [www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/gmemo\\_nepa.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/gmemo_nepa.htm) for more information.

**Guiding Questions:**

- Are there any resources (natural or cultural), which could be affected by the project that may need to be considered in the planning process? (MPO/RPO may be able to conduct a Geographic Information System (GIS) assessment of project location.)

**Notes:**

- All Enhancement projects can qualify as a Categorical Exclusion; however, if there are any potential environmental conflicts, such as wetlands, endangered species, historic properties, the Sponsor will need to complete a programmatic checklist that shows these issues have been addressed, either through a review by or securing a permit from a resource agency.
- Reviews from consulting agencies (US Fish and Wildlife, US Corps of Engineers, State Historic Preservation Office) can take several months—factor this time frame into implementation schedule.
- Important: If a project involves the rehabilitation of a historic property—one that is listed or determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)—all work should comply with the Secretary of Interior's Standards. Factor in additional costs for appropriate work into the budget. Call Sarah McBride at 919-733-6545 x:225 to determine if your resource is listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP.

## 5. DEVELOP A DETAILED BUDGET

**Budget** – An accurate, well-thought out budget is integral to the successful development of a project proposal. Sponsors need to have a realistic understanding of project costs in order to maintain local support and plan for unexpected contingencies through construction.

**Guiding Questions:**

- Does Sponsor have an adequate budget that has factored in costs of any right of way acquisition, hiring engineering or architectural services, and contract administration?
- Does your budget reflect expected costs three (3) years from proposal development?

**Local funding support** – The Sponsor must be willing to commit in their budget twenty percent (20%) of eligible project costs as a cash match, plus additional funds for any cost overruns.

**Maintenance** – Sponsor should develop an acceptable maintenance strategy that takes into account upkeep costs over the useful life of the project. NOTE: Transportation Enhancement funds are not eligible for maintenance activities.